

# UC Berkeley

## IGS Poll

### Title

Release #2020-07: *Broad Support for Farmworker Protections in COVID-19 Context*

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### **Broad Support for Farmworker Protections in COVID-19 Context**

The latest Berkeley IGS Poll finds broad public support for protecting farmworkers and providing access to paid sick leave, medical benefits, and full replacement wages if they fall sick with COVID-19. However, these views vary by region, partisanship, trust in the federal government, and attitudes toward immigrants.

Between April 16 and 20, 2020 the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) and California Initiative for Health Equity & Action (Cal-IHEA), polled 8,800 registered voters about COVID-19. While the majority of employed Californians can work from home, farmworkers continue to work to maintain the country's food supply during a period of critical need. California farmworkers harvest over a third of U.S. vegetables and two-thirds of the country's fruits and nuts.<sup>[1]</sup> However, they remain economically and medically vulnerable to repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Overall Trends in Support for Farmworker Protections**

Results from the voter poll finds broad support for farmworker COVID-19 related employment protections. Most California voters (80%) support employers providing full replacement wages to farmworkers to stay home when sick with COVID-19, while 79% support equitable pay for all farmworkers regardless of legal status or guest worker status, 71% support equitable medical and paid sick leave for both undocumented and documented farmworkers if they fall sick with COVID-19, and 94% support the provision of handwashing stations, personal protective equipment, and work conditions that enable farmworkers to practice social distancing.

### **Regional Differences and Greater Opposition in State's Heartland**

The degree of voter support for protections of farmworker health during the COVID-19 pandemic differs across California's regions. California farm owners in the Central Valley have experienced a shortage of labor over the past few years due to both a surge in deportations and voluntary return of many workers to their home country. Voters in the Central Valley, however, are less likely to support protections for farmworkers despite being the most productive agricultural region of the state and most dependent on farmworkers for their local economy. A quarter of Central Valley voters (25.2%) opposed employer provision of equitable medical and paid sick leave to all farmworkers, regardless of their legal status, if

they fall sick with COVID-19, compared to 12.5% of San Francisco Bay Area and 10.4% of Los Angeles County voters.

Table 1. Undocumented farmworkers should receive the same medical and paid sick leave benefits as documented farmworkers if they fall sick with COVID-19.

	Total	Bay Area	Central Valley	Inland Empire	LA County	Other Northern	Other Southern	San Diego/Orange
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1 (Strongly Support)	49.9	55.7	41.9	42.8	57.7	48.7	45.3	44.4
2 (Support)	20.7	21.5	21.4	18.8	21.9	20.3	18.1	19.5
3 (Neither support or oppose)	11.3	9.8	12.4	13.2	8.7	9.8	12.7	14.9
4 (Oppose)	9	7	11.4	13.7	5.8	10.5	11.8	9.9
5 (Strongly Oppose)	8.7	5.5	12.6	11.5	5.6	9.7	12.1	11

### Support for Equal Wage for All Farmworkers and Trust in Federal Government

U.S. farms increasingly rely on guest-workers (H-2A visa holders), mostly from Mexico, to ease labor shortages. Recently, the White House Chief of Staff and the Agriculture Secretary proposed a “wage relief” to farm owners that allows them to reduce wage rates for guest workers on U.S. farms with the goal of helping ranchers financially hurt by the outbreak.<sup>[2]</sup> This would thereby create differential wages for farmworkers based on their guest worker status. Voter stance on this issue varies drastically by their trust and confidence in the federal government to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked whether all farmworkers, regardless of their legal status or seasonal work status should receive equal pay as they work during the COVID-19 pandemic, 77% of Californians expressing no trust in the federal government strongly supported compared to 31% of those who expressed a lot of trust in the federal government.

Table 2. All farmworkers, regardless of their legal status or seasonal worker status, should receive equal pay as they work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

	Total	A lot of trust in the federal government in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic	Some trust	Not much	Not at all	Don't know
	%	%	%	%	%	%
1 (Strongly Support)	57	30.7	40.4	62.1	76.9	80.7
2 (Support)	22.1	25.1	25.8	23.6	15.2	14.9
3 (Neither support or oppose)	9.8	16.3	13.9	9	4.2	0
4 (Oppose)	5.5	13.1	10.2	2.7	2	2.2
5 (Strongly Oppose)	5.2	14	9.1	2.4	1.7	0
No Opinion	0.4	0.8	0.7	0.3	0.1	2.2

### Partisanship Divide

In California, it is estimated that 60% of farmworkers are undocumented and are left out of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) and ineligible for unemployment insurance and paid sick leave. Among all respondents, 56% strongly approve that as essential workers, farmworkers should receive full replacement wages from their employers to stay home when sick with COVID-19. However, only 30% of Republicans in the state agree farmworkers should receive full wages if they fall sick with COVID-19 compared to 73% of Democrats in the state.

"It is a shame that the general population is not more caring about the health of farmworkers, who work hard during a pandemic to put the food on their tables," said Brenda Eskenazi, Director of the Center for Environmental Research and Children's Health and UC Berkeley professor. "It is time we acknowledge the importance of their role in the economy of California, whether they are documented or not."

Table 3. As essential workers, farmworkers should receive full replacement wages from their employers to stay home when sick with COVID-19.

	Total	Democrats	Republicans	Independent	Other	No Response
		%	%	%	%	%
1 (Strongly Support)	55.7	73.3	30.3	46.6	56	56.3
2 (Support)	24.5	18.9	31.1	29	23.1	8.4
3 (Neither support or oppose)	12.3	5.9	20.9	16.3	12	0
4 (Oppose)	4.5	1.2	10.3	5.2	5.7	16.6
5 (Strongly Oppose)	2.6	0.5	6.9	2.5	3.1	0
No Opinion	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.1	18.8

### Anti-Immigrant Sentiment and Decline in Support

Many advocacy groups have reported that close working conditions in the fields and packing facilities have not changed for farmworkers since the COVID-19 pandemic began.<sup>[3]</sup> Overall, 78% of voters who think that immigrants make the US a better place to live support the view that employers provide handwashing stations, personal protective equipment (PPE), and work conditions that enable farmworkers to practice social distancing, compared to 54% of voters who think immigrants make the U.S. a worse place to live. Farmworkers not only experience increased risks of contracting COVID-19 as they work in close proximity to others, lack adequate PPE, and live in crowded housing, but some are also avoiding public benefits, such as health care, due to fear of becoming a public charge. Anti-immigrant sentiment continues to drive support for exclusionary policy toward immigrants, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4. To prevent COVID-19 among farmworkers, employers should be responsible for providing handwashing stations, personal protective equipment, and work conditions that enable farmworkers to practice social distancing.

	Total	Immigrants make the U.S. a <b>worse</b> place to live	Immigrants make the U.S. a <b>better</b> place to live	No Opinion
	%	%	%	%
1 (Strongly Support)	74.5	53.9	78.3	50.1
2 (Support)	19.6	28.9	17.8	32.6
3 (Neither support or oppose)	3.8	10	2.7	9.4
4 (Oppose)	1.1	3.8	0.7	2.7
5 (Strongly Oppose)	0.7	2.9	0.3	2.8
No Opinion	0.3	0.5	0.2	2.3

### **About the Survey**

The findings in this report are based on a Berkeley IGS Poll completed by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley in conjunction with the California Institute of Health Equity and Access. The poll was administered online in English and Spanish between April 16 and 20 among 8,800 registered voters statewide.

The survey was administered by distributing email invitations to stratified random samples of the state's registered voters. Once the questionnaire and email invitations had been finalized, they were translated into the Spanish and reviewed for cultural appropriateness. Each email included an invitation for invited voters to participate in a nonpartisan survey and provided a link to the IGS website where the survey was housed. Reminder emails were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt out link was provided for voters not wishing to participate and not wanting to receive future emails from IGS about the survey.

Samples of registered voters with email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in California. The email addresses of voters were derived from information contained on the state's official voter registration rolls. The overall sample of registered voters with email addresses was stratified in an attempt to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population.

To protect the anonymity of survey respondents, voters' email addresses and all other personally identifiable information were purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. At the conclusion of the data processing phase, post stratification weights were applied to align the sample to population characteristics of the state's overall registered voter population. The sampling error associated with the results from the survey are difficult to calculate precisely due to the effects of sample stratification and the post- stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that the results are subject to a sampling error of approximately +/-3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Results based on subgroups of this population would be subject to larger margins of sampling error.

### **About the Institute of Governmental Studies**

The Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) is an interdisciplinary organized research unit that pursues a vigorous program of research, education, publication and public service. A component of the University of California system's flagship Berkeley campus, IGS is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system. IGS's co-directors are Associate Professor G. Cristina Mora and Professor Eric Schickler.

IGS conducts periodic surveys of public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion and generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. The director of the Berkeley IGS Poll is Mark DiCamillo. For a complete listing of the reports issued by the Berkeley IGS Poll go to <https://igs.berkeley.edu/igs-poll/berkeley-igs-poll>.

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[1] <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/statistics/>

[2] <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/10/832076074/white-house-seeks-to-lower-farmworker-pay-to-help-agriculture-industry>

[3] <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/us/coronavirus-undocumented-immigrant-farmworkers-agriculture.html>